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## **Badlands in Brief**

## Welcome Episode Transcript

Welcome to Badlands National Park. I'm Ranger Cathy Bell. One of my favorite things about being a park ranger is having the opportunity to help people learn about the park and all the amazing resources that are found here.

Most visitors have lots of questions, and we hope this series of videos will answer some of those questions for you, whether you're planning a trip to Badlands, or just are curious about this wonderful place.

Badlands National Park is located in southwestern South Dakota and is easily reached from Interstate 90. About one million visitors come here each year. Most people spend a few hours to a few days in the park, driving the scenic Badlands Loop Road and taking in the views from our many spectacular overlooks.

The park is named after these steep, rugged badlands formations. The fanciful shapes we see today exist because of the forces of erosion. The rock here is very soft, and is easily washed away. Every time it rains, the landscape changes, eroding at an average rate of about one inch a year.

The rock layers we see in the park were deposited between 75 and 26 million years ago. They give us a glimpse into what this area was like in the distant past—long before there were any people around to see it. It's tough to believe when you look around today, but at the time of the dinosaurs, this area lay beneath a shallow sea. As millions of years passed, the environment gradually changed —first to a lush subtropical forest, then to an open woodland.

Those same rocks also preserve evidence of ancient life. Badlands is the site of some of the world's richest fossil beds; we're especially well known for mammal fossils from the Oligocene Epoch.

The rapid erosion of the badlands formations means that new fossils are constantly being exposed. If you are lucky enough to visit the park and find a fossil, it's important that you leave it where it is. Taking fossils from the park is illegal and damages park resources.

Besides rocks and fossils, the 244,000 acres of the Badlands include the largest mixed-grass prairie protected within the national park system. The prairie is home to many species of wildlife, including bison, bighorn sheep, mule deer, and prairie dogs.

What we've seen today is just a glimpse of what the beautiful Badlands have to offer. No footage we can show captures the experience of being here. So I hope that you're able to make a visit to see your spectacular national park.

Thank you for watching Badlands in Brief.